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Consequences of Job Insecurity: Society trends and its effect on education

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Abstract

According to the US Society for Human Resource Management (2001), a large proportion of today's workforce is concerned about losing their jobs (Probst, 2010). This includes the fear of involuntary job loss, and includes those who hold short-term contracted positions. This situation is not unique to the United States but also extends to countries in Europe and Asia. This article in particular looks at the contracted native English-speaking teachers job performance affected by job insecurity, wage inequality, and time spent on seeking employment.

Key words: job security, stress, wages, contract workers

Introduction

The expansion of economic, social, political and humanity involvement internationally has raised the need for global knowledge provided in higher education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan (MEXT) selects and funds universities to promote internationalization of the academic environment which provides classes taught in English (MEXT, 2012). This also attracts foreign students to offset the decreasing Japanese population in student numbers and to raise its competitiveness in education internationally. At the same time, both global economic competition and governmental policies to cut labor costs and increase labor mobility have led to a workforce increasingly polarized

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between groups of high- and low-skilled workers; the latter face increasing, often intense, job insecurity (Kariya, 2010). In the case of native English-speaking teachers employed in Japanese universities, there is a gap between the wage and job recognition and security among experienced teachers who have similar educational backgrounds and research experiences. The amount of teaching hours are doubled or tripled among the contracted English teachers who receive only 35% to 50% of work compensation compared to the Japanese English teachers and the small percentage of native English-speaking teachers who hold tenured positions. This inequality is secondary compared to the fear of being unable to find employment after the usual 4 to 5-year non-renewable teaching contract terminates. This type of contract also keeps the wage at the minimum in which each new 4–5 year contract offers a basic salary. The consequences of stress caused by job insecurity affect one's job performance and the time spent on searching for employment every 4–5 years exhausts time and energy of both the teachers and the hiring committee members.

Background

Job insecurity among contracted university native English teachers across Japan is rising due to the culture and economic aspects of hiring, the increase in number of new teachers penetrating the university teaching market and the decreasing number of students. This job insecurity is also accompanied by economic inequalities and lack of job recognition. Job insecurity is not a phenomenon but a real life experience which affects workers' psychological well being, and moreover, it affects the end users of the service or products and in the case of education, it is our students who are being affected. Objective threats and subjective threats in the model of job insecurity proposed by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt measure the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). Objective threats to job security including the external factor of the economic likelihood of the length of job and termination are more predictable. The subjective threat, however, is more complex, which includes psychological and personal feelings dealing with the factors and information resulting from the objective threat. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt state, "The threat is experienced as some degree of job insecurity, which is defined as perceived powerlessness in a threatened job situation. Furthermore, workers react to job insecurity, and their reactions have consequences for organizational effectiveness" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). According to a study conducted on Japanese temporary and contracted employees in 2008 among 9641 men and 7717 women, the level of stressful reactions was higher among men than women and it was explained that the traditional norm of men being considered

the breadwinners may be the cause of this result (Inoue, Kawakami, Tsuchiya & Hashimoto, 2010). Although the participants in this study were all Japanese nationals, the situations among native English-speaking teachers working in Japan are predicted to be similar.

Methodology

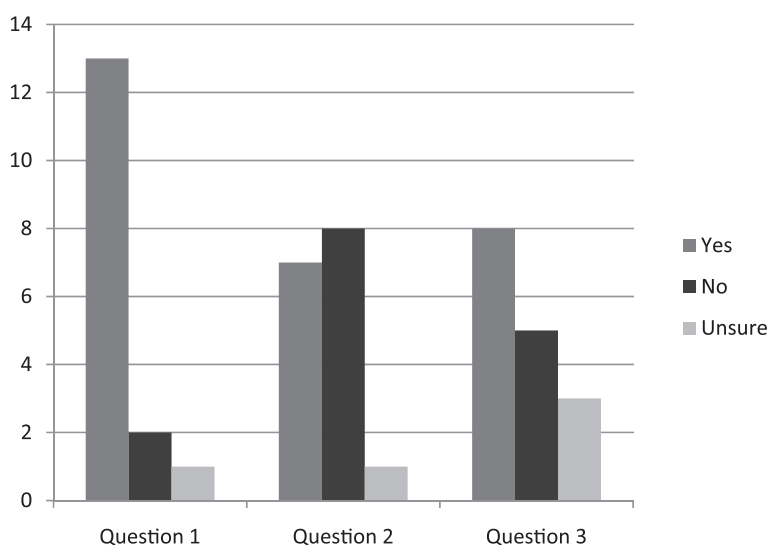
The purpose of this study is to understand if job insecurity and stress caused by wage inequality, and the fear of being unable to find employment after finishing the 4–5 year non-renewable contract affected the teachers' attitude and performance in class. The data are retrieved from a group discussion among 15 native English-speaking teachers teaching in Japanese universities currently on contract with 4 to 5 year terms. 11 male teachers and 4 female teachers participated in this study; 1 male and 2 female teachers are single. A questionnaire designed by the researcher is used during the discussion. The data are reported as told by the participants in graphs. The relation between job insecurity and other factors in the study are the perceptions of the participants. Survey questions 1 to 3 are expressed by the number of participants answering yes or no. Survey questions 4 and 5 will be presented in a summary of the data gathered from the participants.

Survey questions:

1. Do native English teachers feel stressed due to job insecurity?
2. Do native English teachers feel stressed due to salary inequality and overloaded course work?
3. Does the stress affect native English teachers' attitudes toward their job tasks?
4. How long does it take to prepare an application package for each institution applied to?
5. What would the native English-speaking teachers like to see changed in the future hiring practices of Japanese universities?

Results

Among 15 participants, all male teachers answered yes to question one. One concern expressed by the male teachers who are married was the fear that their income may one day fall below the adjusted living standard. Among 15 participants, 13 work part-time to subsidize their current income. Another concern was the change in recent university recruitment requiring a doctoral degree for an English as



Foreign Language teaching position. Most participants voiced that it would cost too much and take too long to complete a doctoral degree. However, knowing that teachers who hold doctoral degrees may be selected before teachers with master's degrees presents a threat which contributes to the participants' level of job insecurity. 7 participants felt that the stress from the number of classes was only the result of being unable to prepare their classes to their satisfaction and grade all assignments on time. Income inequality was expected and therefore did not affect their stress level. When asked if their stress may have affected their attitude toward their job and performance, 8 participants responded strongly and replied that the last year of each 4–5 year contract was unsatisfactory in terms of job performance due to seeking new employment. 4 participants also expressed that the process of employment seeking started even before a year prior to the last year of their contract. Networking is one major source of information and likelihood for future employment opportunities, and this is an ongoing process.

The preparation of putting together an application package can be compared to completing a large project. Each university recruitment center advertises and requests different materials, using different forms and formats with individualized essays on educational philosophies, future research plans and personal interests. Each application package is about as thick as a telephone directory as each university asks for several copies of 3 to 5 publications. Most teachers answered that it took weeks to prepare one application package. Most teachers applied to all job openings on public advertisement and to the openings by referral. On average, each teacher applies to 8 to 10 universities at once. The time and energy consumed was not expressed numerically but can be predicted to have an impact on their

teaching performance. The discussion on question 5 can be summarized with the hope for universities to abolish the 4–5 year limited contract system by providing a possible extension based on teaching evaluations and additional outstanding performances.

Summary

Job insecurity among contracted university native English teachers across Japan affected by objective and subject threats causes the change in their attitude toward their work and leads to lower job performance. This trend may increase as long as the economy continues to stagnate, coupled with the decreasing number of students. Other factors threatening job security are the number of new native English teachers applying for university positions and the increase in the educational requirement from a master's degree to a doctoral degree; these factors also affect teachers' job performance. Similar to the Japanese study conducted, more married male native English teachers expressed stress caused by the fear of being unable to find employment at the end of their teaching contract, and the fear that their wages may one day fall under the living standard. In conclusion, a more fair and reasonable hiring method is necessary to keep those teachers who excel in their teaching, assist in university projects and actively participate in university committees. This change will increase job performance and in a long run, benefit English education in Japan.

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